

ACSs help ease the stress of
Reunion

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overtime to provide a wide spectrum of training aimed at making the transition from duty in the extremely hostile environment of Iraq back to garrison as smooth and painless as possible.

"The downrange chaplains are doing in-country training," said Floyd Davison, Family Advocacy Program manager for the 222nd Base Support Battalion ACS in Baumholder. "We don't want to repeat that training when Soldiers redeploy, but we do want to give them the opportunity to obtain whatever help they may need." That includes giving them the chance to "voice any concerns or complaints" during the reintegration and reunion process, he said.

Spouses and Soldiers returning from Iraq to local communities on their way to other duty assignments or to leave the service are currently being offered classes on a weekly basis at ACSs throughout the 104th ASG. As the major redeployment process kicks into high gear next year, ACSs will increase and expand the training to week-long sessions.

"Some of our units are coming back in February so we're gearing up to be ready in January," said Davison. "We're also continuing our VTC (video tele-conferencing) to quite a few units to help keep families connected. We tell people that the more they communicate while separated, the easier the transition is when they get back."

"We're doing a series of reunion classes through ACS," said Constanze Trembaly, New Parent Support Program manager at Dexheim ACS. "Free child care is included."

Family members and Soldiers who haven't yet had the training are encour-

aged to "come now before the rush," said Pia Morales, Mobilization and Deployment Program educator for the 221st BSB ACS in Wiesbaden. "We want to keep the classes small so that people can feel comfortable to ask questions or express concerns they may have." As more and more Soldiers return, the class sizes will most likely increase, she added.

"They may be out of practice dealing with the stress of daily life. They have to be very aware of how they are reintegrating into their family and to try not to expect to fit back in the way it used to be before they left. There can be a huge disconnect between expectations and reality."

Soldiers and family members to realize there are resources available within the community to assist with any and all changes and expectations that may occur within their relationship."

Returning service members and families have to be prepared for change, ACS officials said.

"From lessons learned in the past we know that if there were problems in a relationship before the Soldier left, the problems didn't go away," said Hamm. "Unit leaders need to be aware that some Soldiers may need to take additional Anger Management and Stress Management classes."

Everyone also needs to be especially attuned to the possibility of abuse or suicidal behavior. "A lot of people are coming back here and are feeling alone even if they do have kids. We have to look at the potential for

"The changes that people experience after being separated are not unique," said Deborah Gantt, Mobilization and Deployment Program manager for the 284th BSB ACS in Giessen. "Whether it's Soldiers coming back on Rest and Recuperation leave or redeploying they'll find changes in their relationships. We put an emphasis on helping them to recognize those changes and to not have false expectations. We also want



Photo by Staff Sgt. Verlin Levi Collins

Local communities are gearing up to provide a host of resources aimed at helping Soldiers readjust to garrison and family life after serving in Iraq.

abuse," said Hamm. "As a Soldier, you are a mandatory reporter. If you think something is happening, you need to let someone know about it."

Fellow Soldiers need to recognize warning signs of suicidal behavior, added Davison. "Leaders must give their Soldiers the opportunity to report anyone who may be actively suicidal." While training will address such topics as post-traumatic stress and depression, everyone must play a role in being aware that some may have a harder time than others adjusting to the transition.

"Changes have happened on both sides — to the family that stayed behind and the Soldier who deployed," said Morales. "You are essentially brand new people in some respects. Don't be disappointed if things are not the same. They won't be."

"The spouse here may fear that you (the returning Soldier) will come back in and take control again," said Hamm. "He or she might expect things to go right back to the way they were before."

Likewise children experience the stress of being separated from a parent and experience different reactions. "If Dad left and said, 'Little Johnny — you're the man of the house now.' And then he comes back and says 'Move over, you're not in charge anymore,' Little Johnny may not be so happy," said Hamm.

While younger children may be "clingy" and extremely emotional upon the return of an absent parent, older children may appear as if they don't really care, when in fact they are simply less demonstrative, he said.

"Children experience stress too. Their reactions to the reunion will differ de-



Photo by Anemone Rueger

Soldiers returning from a lengthy deployment such as Operation Iraqi Freedom need to be aware that things may have changed considerably during their absence and not to have false expectations, ACS officials warn.

pending on age," said Morales.

"We're going out to the schools. We recognize that students are also feeling stress," said Davison. "We're working within our community wherever we see a need."

Thanking Soldiers for their sacrifices and giving them a big welcome is an important part of

the transition, Hamm added. "We need to make sure that we hold good welcome back

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Photo by Alexandra Williams

Martha Pinion (from left), Mobilization and Deployment Readiness Program coordinator at Friedberg Army Community Service, Chaplain (Maj.) Suk Jong Lee and Deborah Gantt, Mobilization and Deployment Readiness Program manager for Giessen ACS, discuss redeployment training issues and plan upcoming classes.

'A Time for Smiles'

Butzbach, Giessen youths spread holiday cheer with toys, refreshments at ACS, airport USO

By Karl Weisel
104th Area Support Group Public Affairs Office

A rainy Saturday at 8 a.m. and business is already booming at the USO lounge at Frankfurt International Airport.

Larry Moton, terminal manager for the Rhein-Main Area USO, is busy keeping the coffee flowing, the computers running and answering one question after another about how to catch shuttle buses, use the telephones and get around in the airport.

That's when Arleton Romaine Johnson, program director for Giessen Youth Services, and nearly a dozen youths arrive laden with presents, baked goods and other refreshments. Giessen and Butzbach Torch and Keystone members and their parents prepared the holiday goodies and wrapped oodles of toys to hand out to U.S. forces members who happened to stop by the USO that day.

"We wanted to give our Keystone and Torch Club members an opportunity to perform a citizenship project," said Johnson. "We helped families in need in the 284th BSB area by gathering one-and-a-half pallets of toys and distributing them to the Army Community Service in Giessen Dec. 4."

"On Dec. 12 the same Keystone and Torch Club members were given another opportunity to serve by taking refreshments and presents to the Frankfurt International Airport USO. The USO staff gen-



Photo by Karl Weisel

Sgt. David Young picks up a couple of presents from Giessen Youth Services program assistant Nilsa San Miguel at the USO Lounge in the Frankfurt Airport Dec. 13.

erously supplied the space," said Johnson. "We wrapped pretty close to 60 or 70 presents for both events."

"The YS staff was up at 5:30 in the morning, and the kids were there early ready to get on the road," said Heidi Knepper, Giessen YS Center director.

"It's awesome — the fact that the kids baked all these cookies with me and that they got up at 6:30 in the morning," said Nilsa G. San Miguel, Giessen YS program assistant. "They were standing in the rain, waiting for me to open the door this morning."

"It's good," said Butzbach Torch Club member Anthony Jackson, age 11. "It's like you're doing something nice for other people."

"I feel good because my dad might come and surprise me. My dad's in Iraq," said fellow YS member Terrell Pasley, age 12.

Butzbach's Michael Abel, age 11, said he liked helping people through the project, but was sad because his father would be absent over the Christmas holidays, serving in Iraq.

"I'm happy because all my friends came too," said Quadel Webb, age 11.

"We're busier now than we've ever

been," said Moton, describing the daily USO operations at both Frankfurt International Airport and the Rhein-Main Air Mobility Command terminal as he continued to help patrons at the USO outreach center. "People appreciate the value of thank you. That's when you know it's worth the effort."

"We're open every day of the year except New Year's Day," Moton added. "We'll be here on Christmas Day."

As Americans continued to stop by the Frankfurt Airport USO to pick up a copy of *The Stars and Stripes*, check their email and watch the latest headlines on the complimentary television, many were surprised to discover the holiday goodies and gifts being handed out to youths of U.S. ID card holders.

Sgt. David Young was all smiles as he collected a couple of gifts for his children. "My kids will be happy," he said.

Toys R Us, members of "Good Morning America" and Boys and Girls Clubs of America donated a million dollars worth of toys to Army communities throughout Europe. The "A Time for Smiles" program kicked off last year as a way to bring holiday cheer to military youths around the world.



Photo by Arleton Romaine Johnson

Giessen and Butzbach Keystone and Torch Club members wrap presents before distributing them to needy families at the Giessen ACS and at the Frankfurt International Airport USO Lounge.



Photo by Karl Weisel

Youths carry packages into the Frankfurt International Airport USO Lounge to hand out to families of U.S. ID card holders passing through the facility.